

# ZEPHANIAH

## INTRODUCTION

Zephaniah identifies himself better than any of the other minor prophets. Habakkuk concealed himself in silence -- we know nothing about his background -- but Zephaniah goes to the opposite extreme and tells us more than is ordinary. He traces his lineage back to his great-great-grandfather, Hizkiah (whom we know as Hezekiah), king of Judah. In other words, Zephaniah was of the royal line.

Zephaniah located the time of his writing just as clearly as he did his identification: "in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah" ([Zeph. 1:1](#)). It was a dark day for the nation. According to the arrangement of the Hebrew Scriptures, Zephaniah was the last of the prophets before the Captivity. He was contemporary with Jeremiah and perhaps with Micah, although I doubt that. His was the swan song of the Davidic kingdom, and he is credited with giving impetus to the revival during the reign of Josiah.

The little Book of Zephaniah will never take the place of [John 3:16](#) and the Gospel of John as number one in Bible popularity. The contents of this book have never been familiar, and I doubt that it has been read very much. I dare say that few have ever heard a sermon on Zephaniah. One Sunday morning several years ago, as I was about to preach on this book, I asked the congregation how many had ever heard a message on Zephaniah before. Out of the 2500-3000 who were present, only two hands were raised! Such neglect is not due to the mediocrity or the inferiority of this little book. If its theme were known, I think it would be very much appreciated because it has the same theme as the Gospel of John. John is called the apostle of love; and as we study this book, we will find that Zephaniah is the prophet of love. That may be difficult for you to believe, but let me give you a verse to demonstrate my point. You are acquainted with [John 3:16](#), but are you acquainted with [Zephaniah 3:17](#)? -- "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." This is lovely, is it not? However, Zephaniah is a little different from the Gospel of John, for this verse is just a small island which is sheltered in the midst of a storm-tossed sea. Much of this book seems rather harsh and cruel; it seems as if it is fury poured out. Chapter 3 opens in this vein: "Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!" ([Zeph. 3:1](#)). There is so much judgment in this little book; therefore, how can love be its theme? To find proof that love is the theme of this little book is like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack, but I will illustrate my point by telling you a mystery story. This may seem to be a very peculiar way to begin a study of Zephaniah, but it is going to help us understand this little book. The title of my story is --

### **The Dark Side Of Love**

It was late at night in a suburban area of one of our great cities in America. A child lay restless in her bed. A man, with a very severe and stern look, stealthily entered her bedroom and softly approached her bed. The moment the little girl saw him, a terrified look came over her face, and she began to scream. Her mother rushed into the room and went over to her. The trembling child threw her arms about her mother.

The man withdrew to the telephone, called someone, who was evidently an accomplice, and in a very soft voice made some sort of an arrangement. Hastily the man reentered the room, tore the child from the mother's arms, and rushed out to a waiting car. The child was sobbing, and he attempted to stifle her cries. He drove madly down street after street until he finally pulled up before a large, sinister, and foreboding-looking building. All was quiet, the building was partially dark, but there was one room upstairs ablaze with light.

The child was hurriedly taken inside, up to the lighted room, and put into the hands of the man with whom the conversation had been held over the telephone in the hallway. In turn, the child was handed over to another accomplice -- this time a woman -- and these two took her into an inner room. The man who had brought her was left outside in the hallway. Inside the room, the man plunged a gleaming, sharp knife into the vitals of that little child, and she lay as if she were dead.

Your reaction at this point may be, "I certainly hope they will catch the criminal who abducted the little girl and is responsible for such an awful crime!"

However, I have not described to you the depraved and degraded action of a debased mind. I have not taken a chapter out of the life of the man in Cell 2455, Death Row. I have not related to you the sordid and sadistic crime of a psychopathic criminal. On the contrary, I have described to you a tender act of love. In fact, I can think of no more sincere demonstration of love than that which I have described to you. I am sure you are amazed when I say that. Let me fill in some of the details, and then you will understand.

You see, that little girl had awakened in the night with severe abdominal pain. She had been subject to such attacks before, and the doctor had told her parents to watch her very carefully. It was her father who had hurried into the room. When he saw the suffering of his little girl, he went to the telephone, called the family physician, and arranged to meet him at the hospital. He then rushed the little girl down to the hospital and handed her over to the family physician who took her to the operating room and performed emergency surgery.

Through it all, every move and every act of that father was of tender love, anxious care, and wise decision. I have described to you the dark side of love -- but love, nevertheless. The father loved the child just as much on that dark night when he took her to the hospital and delivered her to the surgeon's knife as he did the next week when he brought her flowers and candy. It was just as much a demonstration of deep affection when he delivered her into the hands of the surgeon as it was the next week when he brought her home and delivered her into the arms of her mother. My friend, love places the eternal security and permanent welfare of the object of love above any transitory or temporary comfort or present pleasure down here upon this earth. Love seeks the best interests of the beloved. That is what this little Book of Zephaniah is all about -- the dark side of love.

In our nation we have come through a period when the love of God has been exaggerated out of all proportion to the other attributes of our God. It has been presented on the sunny side of the street with nothing of the other side ever mentioned. There is a "love" of God

presented that sounds to me like the doting of grandparents rather than the vital and vigorous concern of a parent for the best interests of the child.

The liberal preacher has chanted like a parrot. He has used shopworn cliches and tired adjectives. He has said, "God is love, God is love, God is love" until he has made it saccharin sweet; yet he has not told about the dark side of the love of God. He has watered down love, making it sickening rather than stimulating, causing it to slop over on every side like a sentimental feeling rather than an abiding concern for the object of love.

However, I want you to notice that there is the dark side of the love of God. He deals with us according to our needs, my friend. The Great Physician will put His child on the operating table. He will use the surgeon's knife when He sees a tumor of transgression or a deadly virus sapping our spiritual lives or the cancerous growth of sin. He does not hesitate to deal with us severely. We must learn this fact early: He loves us when He is subjecting us to surgery just as much as when He sends us candy and flowers and brings us into the sunshine.

Sometimes the Great Physician will operate without giving us so much as a sedative. But you can always be sure of one thing. When He does this, He will pour in the balm of Gilead. When He sees that it is best for you and for me to go down through the valley of suffering, that it will be for our eternal welfare, He will not hesitate to let us go down through that dark valley. Someone has expressed it in these lines:

Is there no other way, Oh, God,  
Except through sorrow, pain and loss,  
To stamp Christ's likeness on my soul,  
No other way except the cross?  
And then a voice stills all my soul,  
As stilled the waves of Galilee.  
Can'st thou not bear the furnace,  
If midst the flames I walk with thee?  
I bore the cross, I know its weight;  
I drank the cup I hold for thee.  
Can'st thou not follow where I lead?  
I'll give thee strength, lean hard on Me!

My friend, He loves us most when He is operating on us, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth . . ." ([Heb. 12:6](#)) -- in other words, He child-trains, He disciplines us.

Under another figure, the Lord Jesus presented it yonder in the Upper Room to those who were His own. He said, in [John 15:1-2](#): "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth [prunes] it, that it may bring forth more fruit." We must remember that the Father reaches into your life and mine and prunes out that which is not fruitbearing -- and it hurts! But, as a Puritan divine said years ago, "The husbandman is never so close to the branch as when he is trimming it." The Father is never more close to you, my friend, than when He is reaching in and taking out of your heart and life those things that offend.

It was Spurgeon who noticed a weather vane that a farmer had on his barn. It was an unusual weather vane, for on it the farmer had the words, GOD IS LOVE. Mr. Spurgeon

asked him, "Do you mean by this that God's love is as changeable as the wind?" The farmer shook his head. "No," he said, "I do not mean that God's love changes like that. I mean that whichever way the wind blows, God is love."

Today it may be the soft wind from the south that He brings to blow across your life, for He loves you. But tomorrow He may let the cold blasts from the north blow over your life -- and if He does, He still loves you.

It has been expressed in these familiar lines in a way I never could express it myself:

God hath not promised skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;  
God hath not promised sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.  
God hath not promised we shall not know  
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;  
He hath not told us we shall not bear  
Many a burden, many a care.  
But God hath promised strength for the day,  
Rest for the laborer, light for the way,  
Grace for the trials, help from above,  
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.  
-- Annie Johnson Flint

Beloved, if you are a child of God and are in a place of suffering, be assured and know that God loves you. Regardless of how it may appear, He loves you, and you cannot ever change that fact.

Sweetness and light are associated with love on every level and rightly so, but this aspect does not exhaust the full import of love. Love expresses itself always for the good of the one who is loved. This is the reason that it is difficult to associate love with the judgment of God. The popular notion of God is that He is a super Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. One nature of His is expressed by love, and the other nature is expressed by wrath in judgment. These two appear to be contrary to the extent that there seem to be two Gods. The Book of Zephaniah is filled with the wrath and judgment of God (see [Zeph. 1:15](#); [Zeph. 3:8](#)), but there is the undertone of the love of God (see [Zeph. 3:17](#)).

Let me now tell you a true story to illustrate the dark side of love. One Mother's Day, while I was still a pastor in downtown Los Angeles, I looked out over my congregation, and I could tell that there were many mothers present. They were dressed a little special for the day, and many of them were wearing corsages. But I also noticed one mother who did not look as happy as the others. There was a note of sorrow on her face, although she wore a beautiful orchid corsage, the biggest one I had ever seen. I knew that it came from her son in the East. He is a prominent businessman, and high up in government circles as well, but he is not a Christian. He turns a deaf ear to his mother's pleadings. She prays for him constantly and asks others to pray for him. I recall that one Sunday morning she came to me, with tears streaming down her cheeks, and she said, "Oh, Dr. McGee, I pray that God will save my boy. I pray that He will save him even if he has to put him on a sickbed." Then, almost fiercely, she said, "Even if He has to kill him, I pray that God will save him before it is too late!" Suppose a detective from the police department had been listening to our conversation. Would he have arrested her for making that statement? No.

He could not have arrested her at all. What she said was not a threat but was actually a statement of love. Because she loved that boy, she was actually willing to give him up and to let him go down through the doorway of death if it would mean the salvation of his soul.

The little prophecy of Zephaniah presents the dark side of the love of God. He is a God of love, but He is also a God of judgment. Zephaniah opens with the rumblings of judgment, and you will not find judgment enunciated in any more harsh manner than it is in this book.

Two thoughts stand out in this brief book:

1. "The day of the LORD" occurs seven times in this little prophecy. Obadiah and Joel, the first of the writing prophets, were the first to use this expression. All of the prophets refer to it; and now Zephaniah, the last of the writing prophets, before the Captivity, brings it to our attention again. He uses it more than any of the other prophets. The actual phrase occurs seven times, but there are other references to it. This expression has particular application to the Great Tribulation period, which precedes the Kingdom; but the Day of the Lord also includes the time of the Kingdom. The Great Tribulation period is ended by the coming of Christ personally to the earth to establish the millennial Kingdom -- and all that is included in the Day of the Lord. The emphasis in the Book of Zephaniah is upon judgment. Joel also opens his prophecy with a description of a great locust plague, which he likens to the Day of the Lord that is coming in the future. Joel says that the Day of the Lord is not light; it is darkness. It is on the black background of man's sin that God writes in letters of light the wonderful gospel story for you and me.

2. "Jealousy" occurs twice in this book. God's jealousy is on a little different plane from that of yours and mine. In our jealousy, we seek to do evil. God is jealous of those who are His own. He is jealous of mankind. He created him, and He has purchased a redemption for him, and made it possible for him to be saved. It is not His will that any should perish; He wants them saved -- He is jealous for mankind. But when they don't turn to Him, He is going to judge them. The thing which the Book of Zephaniah makes clear is that God is glorified in judging as well as He is glorified in saving. A great many people cannot understand how that is possible. [Ezekiel 38](#) -- [Ezekiel 39](#) speaks of the time in the future when God will judge Russia. We read there, "And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes" ([Ezek. 38:16](#)). In other words, God is saying, "I intend to judge this godless nation, and when I do, I shall be glorified in that judgment." That is a tremendous statement for God to make, and for a great many people, it is a bitter pill to swallow. But it might be well for us to learn to think God's thoughts after Him, realizing that our thoughts are not His thoughts and our ways are not His ways at all.

## **Outline**

**I. Judgment of Judah and Jerusalem, [Zep. 1](#)**

**II. Judgment of Earth and of All Nations, [Zep. 2:1](#) through [Zep. 3:8](#)**

### III. All Judgments Removed; Kingdom Established, [Zep. 3:9-20](#)

## Chapter 1

**THEME:** Judgment of Judah and Jerusalem

The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah [[Zeph. 1:1](#)].

Zephaniah identifies himself as being of the royal family. Hezekiah, king of Judah, was his great-great-grandfather. Zephaniah prophesied during the days of the reign of Josiah, which was the period of the last spiritual movement that took place in the southern kingdom of Judah. There was a revival during that time -- it wasn't a great one, it didn't last long, but there was a revival. Zephaniah knew something of the reigns of Amon, an evil king, and of Manasseh, also a terrible king. He saw that judgment was coming upon his nation and upon his people, and his message is a very harsh one.

I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD [[Zeph. 1:2](#)].

This is certainly strong language. God says, "I intend to judge, and when I do, I will actually scrape the land. The land will be as if a dirt scraper had been run over it. Just as you wipe clean a dish, that is the way I intend to judge them."

As we move further into this prophecy, we will recognize that this judgment covers more than just the land of Israel. It is a worldwide devastation that is predicted here. The Book of Revelation confirms this and places the time of this judgment as the Great Tribulation period. During that period, this earth will absolutely be denuded by the judgments that will come upon it. This will occur right before God brings in the millennial Kingdom and renews the earth.

I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from the land, saith the LORD [[Zeph. 1:3](#)].

"I will consume man and beast" -- all living creatures are included in this judgment. When I was in the land of Israel, I was told that they have a zoo somewhere up around the Sea of Galilee. They are making an effort to gather together the animals that were in existence in Bible days and to put them in this zoo. Obviously, as the population of Israel increases, the same thing will happen as has happened in the United States. Certain animal species will become extinct and disappear. God says that this is exactly what is going to happen when He judges that land. Many species -- in fact, all of them -- will become extinct at that time. This is to be a very severe judgment.

I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests [[Zeph. 1:4](#)].

"I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem." God now makes it clear that Judah and Jerusalem are to be singled out for judgment.

"I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place." The thing that brings the judgment of God upon the land is very specific" -- it is idolatry. In the prophecy of Habakkuk, God mentions five woes He was going to bring upon the people because of certain sins which they had committed. Idolatry was the last one; it was the fifth woe. But here Zephaniah narrows it down and puts his hand on idolatry -- that is, false religion.

The Scriptures, beginning with the Book of Judges, teach a philosophy of human government, which you will find was true of God's people and which has been true of every nation. The first step in a nation's decline is religious apostasy, a turning from the living and true God. The second step downward for a nation is moral awfulness. The third step downward is political anarchy.

A great many people in the United States today think that our problem is in Washington, D.C. -- I don't think so. Another group of people feel that if people could be reformed, if we could get people to act nicely, not be violent and not steal, if we could just lift our moral standards, then that would solve our problems. Again, I don't think that is the problem. Very frankly, I believe that the problem in this country is religious apostasy. The problem is out yonder with you and right here with me. The problem is that the church has failed to give God's message. I am not talking about every church or your church necessarily. There are many Bible-teaching churches across this country which have wonderful pastors who are standing for God -- and I thank God for them. But the great denominations, by and large, have now departed from the faith. They have come to the place where they no longer give an effective message to the nation. As a result, from this religious apostasy have flowed moral awfulness and political anarchy.

If you think that this is just the wild raving of a fundamentalist preacher, you are wrong. Let me quote an excerpt from an editorial in a major metropolitan newspaper a number of years ago. Speaking of the failure of the churches to present any spiritual message whatsoever, the editorial concluded:

This betrayal of Christ in the name of Christianity is one reason for the moral and spiritual malaise with which this country is afflicted. The melancholy fact is that the churches no longer influence the development of national character. People go to church mainly because of an impulse to participate in a service of worship, not because of any spiritual guidance they expect from the clergyman.

What a note of condemnation this is! This is true not just of our nation but of every nation.

The historian Gibbon concluded that there were five reasons for the decline and fall of Rome. Gibbon was not a Christian, but here is why he says Rome fell: (1) The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society. (2) Higher and higher taxes; the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the populace. (3) The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting, more brutal, more immoral. (4) The building of great armaments when the great enemy

was within; the decay of individual responsibility. (5) The decay of religion, fading into mere form, losing touch with life, losing power to guide the people.

The message of Zephaniah carries out this scriptural principle of human government, and he puts his finger right down on the sore spot in the southern kingdom of Judah -- idolatry. Zephaniah saw what was happening. The people were now on the toboggan; they were on the way down and out, and judgment was coming. Idolatry is where every great nation has gone off the track. When a nation departs from the living and true God or when it gives up great moral principles which were based on religion, when it goes into idolatry, these factors eventually lead it into gross immorality and into political anarchy.

The interesting thing is that three kinds of idolatry, I believe, are mentioned to us here. "I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place." The first form of idolatry is the worship of Baal which was introduced into the northern kingdom by Jezebel whose father was the high priest of the worship among the Sidonians. In the southern kingdom, the worship of Baal was popularized and the altars of Baal were rebuilt during the reign of Manasseh. This is an instance which illustrates why it would be wonderful to study at the same time the corresponding portions of the prophetic and historical books of Scripture. At this point it would be helpful to read the background of the reign of Manasseh (see [2Kings 21](#); [2Chron. 33](#)). No king ever departed as far from God as this man did. He reintroduced the worship of Baal, which was a very immoral form of worship. Along with the worship of Baal was worship of Ashtoreth. When the female principal is introduced in deity, you have gross immorality; and that, of course, came into the life of the nation during this period. Baal worship was a form, therefore, of nature worship and was very crude indeed. When Josiah became king (he was a good king), the first thing he did was to try to remove the worship of Baal.

"And the name of the Chemarims with the priests." Chemarims actually means "black priests" -- they wore black garments. Have you noticed that those who engage in the worship of Satan today don black garments? It is quite interesting that it is not original with them. It comes all the way down from these idolatrous priests who wore black robes. Zephaniah says that these priests are to be judged.

And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops;  
and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that  
swear by Malcham [[Zeph. 1:5](#)].

"And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops." Zephaniah now mentions the second form of idolatry that became prevalent in that land. It was more subtle and very dangerous indeed. Their housetops were flat -- that is true even today in the land of Israel. It is the place where the family gathered in the evening. In fact, God gave a law about putting a banister, a railing, around the roof so that no one would fall off. Zephaniah says that the housetop became a place of worship, and you can see how idolatry was moving into the homes. It meant that actually every home was a little heathen temple where idolatry was practiced; idolatry was really reaching into the homes.

"Them that worship the host of heaven" -- the sun, the moon, the stars. It was a worship of the creature rather than the Creator. They worshiped that which had been made rather than worshipping the Creator. This was the second form of idolatry which they adopted.

The worst, the most sophisticated, and the most subtle of all the forms of idolatry, is the one that is mentioned next -- "and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham." Malcham is the name of Molech, the god of the Ammonites. It was a worship in which they actually sacrificed their children. The subtlety of it was that at the same time they professed to worship the living and true God. They went to the temple. They said that they knew the Lord, that they believed in God. But they also worshiped Molech -- they were doing both.

This is the subtle thing that is also taking place today. There are many so-called churches that by the wildest stretch of the imagination could never be called Christian churches. The true church is built around a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. The early church met together to worship and adore Him, to come to know Him, and to have fellowship around Him. Everything they did pointed to Jesus Christ. How many churches do you know of where Christ is not even mentioned? If He is mentioned, He is mentioned in a derogatory manner. In other words, His deity is denied. They deny that He is God. They do not worship Him, but they give lip service to Him. They talk about the teachings of Jesus and about what a wonderful man He was. They even call Him a "superstar"! But they deny everything that has been set down in the Scriptures for us as Christians. It is a castrated Christianity that is abroad today.

This is the kind of subtle idolatry that was coming up in the land of Judah in that day. People were still going through the rituals, still going to the temple on the Sabbath. I don't think they came any other time, but they were there then. However, they were actually worshiping Molech. Molech was the god of the flesh. It was a fleshly worship -- again, there was gross immorality. Likewise today, there are those who go to church -- they have a churchianity but not a Christianity. They deny the great facts of the Christian faith. They practice immorality, or they practice things that are contrary to the Word of God. This is the picture of Judah in that day, and it is the subtlety of the hour in which we live. A great many people think that if a building has a steeple on it, a bell in that steeple, an organ, a big center aisle for weddings, a pulpit down front, and a choir loft, these make it a church. My friend, it may be one of the worst spots in town! It may be worse than any barroom, any gambling establishment, or any brothel in town. This is the thing that is so deceptive. The thing that undermined the nation of Judah is that they pretended that they were serving the living and true God, but they were giving themselves over to Molech idolatry.

And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him [[Zeph. 1:6](#)].

The people have turned completely from God. Two classes are mentioned: backsliders and those who were never saved.

Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests [[Zeph. 1:7](#)].

"Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD." The suggestion is, "Hush, hush. Don't talk out. Don't speak out. No protesting. You are in the presence of the living God." There is a great lack of reverence for God today. This notion that Jesus is sort of a buddy,

that God is the man upstairs, and that we can be very flippant when we speak of Him, is all wrong. May I say to you, our God is a holy God. If you and I were to come within a billion miles of Him, we would fall down on our faces before Him because of who He is. He is the great God, the Creator of the universe, and we are merely little creatures.

"Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD." Why? "For the day of the LORD is at hand." This is the first mention of the Day of the Lord in this book. The Day of the Lord is presented here primarily as the time of judgment. If you want to fit it into God's program, it is the Great Tribulation period -- that is when it begins. Today, you and I are living in the day of Christ, the day of grace. The Day of the Lord will begin when the church leaves this earth. Then God will begin to move in judgment.

Prior to that day, which is still in the future, there have been times which have been likened unto the Day of the Lord. When Nebuchadnezzar finally came and destroyed Jerusalem, burned it to the ground, and plowed it under, he left that land denuded. If you go to that land today, there are very few trees. Oh, I know that Israel has planted millions of trees, but you see barren hills everywhere. At one time those hills were all covered with trees and vineyards. It was a land of milk and honey, but it is not that today. There is still evidence of that which the enemy did. The Babylonians who came under Nebuchadnezzar were followed later by the Medo-Persians, then Alexander the Great, and finally the Romans. Enemy after enemy has come into that land. As a result, very few trees are left, and the land is almost completely denuded today. God made it very clear that that was what He was going to do -- and He did it. The evidence is still there today. That judgment was for those people "the day of the LORD," but it does not completely satisfy these prophecies. Zephaniah makes it very clear that the Day of the Lord is that day which is yet in the future and which will be consummated when Christ comes and establishes His Kingdom here upon this earth.

With almost biting sarcasm, Zephaniah says, "For the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests." The guests are going to be the sacrifice, by the way, and the sacrifice is the judgment that is coming upon this nation.

And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD'S sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel [[Zeph. 1:8](#)].

The thought here is that the rulers had turned away from God. All you have to do is to refer to the time when Zedekiah reigned. He was the last of the kings, and he actually saw his own children killed right before his eyes, and then his own eyes were put out (see [2Kings 24](#) -- [2Kings 25](#)). That was surely harsh judgment, but they had had the warning from God. To these people, this was like the Day of the Lord.

In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit [[Zeph. 1:9](#)].

Dr. Charles Feinberg (Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi, p. 48) writes, "What is referred to is the zeal with which the servants of the rich hastened from their homes to plunder the property of others to enrich their masters." There were those who would take over the land and the homes of the poor. What was happening in that day was that the

great middle class disappeared and you had the extreme rich and the extreme poor. The same thing is certainly happening in my own country today. God says to these people that He is going to judge them for this.

And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, and an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills [[Zeph. 1:10](#)].

"And it shall come to pass in that day" -- this is clearly a reference to the Day of the Lord.

"That there shall be the noise of a cry from the fish gate." The fish gate is what is known today as the Damascus Gate. It was the gate through which they brought the fish from the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. It is located on the north side of the city of Jerusalem.

"And an howling from the second, and a great crashing from the hills." The Damascus Gate today is down in a rather low place. If you are acquainted with Jerusalem, you know that the city is surrounded by hills. Zephaniah is saying that in any direction you would want to move, there will be this wailing of the people when the time of judgment has come upon them.

Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off [[Zeph. 1:11](#)].

Maktesh means "mortar." There is supposed to have been a depression in the city of Jerusalem where the marketplace was situated. It was perhaps the cheesemakers' valley. It was the valley that went alongside the temple where the Wailing Wall is today -- which is a good place for it. "Howl, ye inhabitants of Maktesh, for all the merchant people are cut down; all they that bear silver are cut off."

And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil [[Zeph. 1:12](#)].

"And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles." In other words, it is like taking a flashlight and going to look for an individual who is hiding in the dark. God says, "I intend to search out Jerusalem just like that. I will bring to light all the evil and the sin."

"And punish the men that are settled on their lees." This is an idiomatic expression that corresponds, I think, to our idiom today when we say, "Take it easy." These people were taking it easy. They did not believe they would be judged any more than people today believe that we are to be judged as a nation.

"That say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil." They are saying, "God's doing nothing. God is not going to do anything about it." Habakkuk's question was, "Why don't you do something about the evil, Lord?" God told him, "I am doing something." And when Habakkuk was given a vision and saw what God was really doing, he cried out to God for mercy for the people. A great many people today say, "I'll ignore God. He doesn't do good. He doesn't do evil." They are absolutely neutral about

God. This type of thinking, of course, is what led to the abominable theology that God is dead. Only a society like ours could have produced that kind of theology, because people in an affluent society say, "We don't need God at all." As a result, they think that He doesn't do good, He doesn't do evil, He doesn't do anything. But they are greatly mistaken, and Zephaniah is going to make that very clear to us.

Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof [[Zeph. 1:13](#)].

"Therefore their goods shall become a booty." The goods which they took by plundering and pillaging and robbing are going to be taken away from them in just the same way as they got them.

"And their houses a desolation" -- in other words, there would be ghost towns in Israel.

"They shall also build houses, but not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof." God had given a law to these people that when a man planted a vineyard, he was not to go to war until he had eaten the fruit of that vineyard. Another law said that if a man married, he was to be excused from going to war for a year. Here God is saying that they are going to plant vineyards, but they are not going to drink the wine of them because they have sinned. They won't be able to take time off from warfare. Neither will they be able to take time off when they get married because the enemy is going to come in like a flood.

The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly [[Zeph. 1:14](#)].

"The great day of the LORD is near." This great Day of the Lord is the time of the Great Tribulation in the future. In Zephaniah's day, after Josiah ruled, there never arose in the southern kingdom another good king. Every one of them was bad. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah -- every one of them was a corrupt king. Now judgment is going to come upon the nation and upon the people for their departure from God. But they are going to experience only a very small portion of what is in the future in the great Day of the Lord.

Zephaniah says, "It is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly." In other words, the concept of the Wailing Wall would come into existence. And it is going to be there until after the Great Tribulation period because Israel will never know peace until the Prince of Peace comes and they acknowledge their Messiah.

That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness [[Zeph. 1:15](#)].

Dr. Charles Feinberg is an excellent Hebrew scholar, and he calls our attention to many things that you and I would normally pass over. I would highly recommend to you his work on the minor prophets. There is a play upon words in this verse that Dr. Feinberg

brings out which we miss in the English, of course: "The Hebrew words for wasteness and desolation -- sho'ah and umesho'ah -- are alike in sound to convey the monotony of the destruction." But we do have in the English an alliteration that reveals something of it. It is a day of trouble, then distress, desolation, darkness, and thick darkness, so that there is a play upon words even in the English.

Zephaniah is speaking here of the harshness, the intensity of the judgment that is coming, and the question naturally arises: How can a God of love do a thing like this? We will find before we finish our study of this book that it is like the story I told in the Introduction of the father who took his little child to the surgeon to be operated upon. The picture can be presented in such a way that it looks like he is being cruel and harsh to bring her to the doctor who will plunge his knife into her. But actually, everything the father did was out of love for his little girl. Even the great day of wrath is a judgment of God, but it has in it the love of God. Regardless of what takes place, God is love. It is like the farmer who had on his barn the weather vane which said on it, GOD IS LOVE. The farmer explained it by saying, "Regardless of which way the wind blows, God is love." That is true, my friend.

Even in judgment, God is still a God of love. And He judges because it is essential for Him to judge that which is evil. He does that because He has to be true to Himself, and He could not be good to His creatures unless He did that. If God is going to permit sin throughout eternity, if God does not intend to judge sin, if you and I are going to have to wrestle with disease and with heartbreak and with disappointment and with sorrow throughout eternity, I cannot conceive that He is a God of love. But if you tell me that God is going to judge sin, that He is coming in with a mighty judgment, and that He is going to remove sin from His universe, I'm going to say, "Hallelujah!" And I will believe that He is a God of love even when He does that.

A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and  
against the high towers [[Zeph. 1:16](#)].

When God gave to the nation Israel the trumpets that they were to blow on the wilderness march, there were several ways in which they were to be used. Having mentioned the different ways the two silver trumpets were to be used, the Lord says in [Numbers 10:9](#), "And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresses you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies." Zephaniah says here that it is "a day of the trumpet"; they are going to blow the alarm, but God does not intend to deliver them. Why? He intended to judge them. He intends to deliver them over to the enemy, not deliver them from the enemy. It is to be "A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers."

And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind  
men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood  
shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung [[Zeph.  
1:17](#)].

This is extreme judgment, I'll grant you. But, you know, surgery today is extreme. After my doctor operated on me the first time for cancer, I was asking him about the operation.

He told me, "I cut on you until there was almost a question as to which pile was McGee!" It's a pretty harsh thing to cut on a fellow like that, but my doctor didn't do it because he was angry with me. He didn't do it even in judgment. He did it actually to save my life, and I believe that on the human level he did save my life by that severe method. May I say to you, God will judge, and He does it in an extreme way. He does extreme surgery, but He does it for the sake of the body politic.

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land [[Zeph. 1:18](#)].

It has been quite interesting that this nation in which I live has spent billions of dollars throughout the world trying to buy friends, trying to win friends and influence people. But we are hated throughout the world today -- we are not loved. You cannot buy love; you cannot win people over with silver and gold. But in this country we still believe that money solves all the ills of this life, that money is the answer to all the problems. God says that when He begins to judge, "neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath."

"But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land." God removed them from the land. Why did He do that? He did that because He loved them. If He had not done it, it would have been necessary to exterminate totally succeeding generations. For the sake of the future generations -- so not all would have to be slain -- God had to move in and cut away the cancer of sin that was destroying the nation.

## Chapter 2

**THEME:** Judgment of the earth and of all nations

God has not only judged His own people, but God also judges the nations; and that is the subject of this chapter and through [verse 8](#) of chapter 3. But God is gracious, long-suffering, and not willing that any should perish; therefore, He sends out a final call. Although you would think that He had reached the end of His patience, in the first three verses we find Zephaniah sending out God's last call to the nation of Judah to repent and to come to Him.

Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired [[Zeph. 2:1](#)].

"Gather yourselves together." They are to come together as a people, as Dr. Feinberg has stated it, ". . . to a religious assembly to entreat the favor of the Lord in order that by prayer He may turn away His judgment" (Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi, p. 53).

"Yea, gather together, O nation not desired." Their sin, of course, has caused God to bring judgment upon them. But it is not that He does not desire them; it is not because He does not love them. Judgment came upon them because of their sin. They were repugnant, they were repulsive; yet they were insensible to the shame of their sinful

condition. Their sin had reached a very low stage, and they were dead to shame; they had no sense of decency at all. They were shameless in their conduct. We would say that they had no sensitivity to sin whatsoever. They sinned with impudence. They would sin openly and actually boast of it.

We have come to that same place as a nation today. Someone said to me not long ago, "Dr. McGee, you speak as if America is sinning more and is in a worse condition today than it ever was before." I do not mean to imply that at all. However, I do not believe that there was just as much sin when I was growing up as there is today, but the sin was carried on behind the curtain or in the backyard or someplace else where it could not be seen. It was not flaunted before the world. It was not boasted of. In other words, it was not shameless sin as it is at the present time. I heard a very beautiful young woman on a talk program on television boast of the fact that she is living with a man to whom she is not married. The others on the program congratulated her for her "courage" and "broad-mindedness." Nobody called it shameless sin. Sin is right out in the open today. I don't think there is more sin -- it is just out in the open where you can see it. They sinned in my day, that's for sure, but it was done under cover. It was done secretly, and there was a sense of sorrow for sin which we seem to have lost today. You and I do not know how repulsive our sin is to God. We spend very little time weeping over our sins.

Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff,  
before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day  
of the LORD's anger come upon you [[Zeph. 2:2](#)].

God says, "Come together for prayer. Come together for repentance. Come together and turn to Me." There is a note of urgency here. Zephaniah is saying to the people, "Do this before God begins to move in judgment, because when you pass over the line and God begins to move in judgment, you will find out it's too late."

One of the things that is needed today in my country is for someone whose voice is heard to call our nation to prayer and to repentance. My nation has almost reached the end of its rope. This is a great need, and that kind of prayer God will hear and answer.

Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought  
his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye  
shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger [[Zeph. 2:3](#)].

"Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment." There has always been a remnant of those people who are true to God just as there is a remnant in the church today. I doubt that there are many churches -- no matter how liberal they may be -- who are without some members who are real believers. Now I don't understand why they are there, and I don't propose to sit in judgment on them, but there is a remnant within the liberal church today. God has always had a remnant in the world, and apparently He is speaking here to those who are the godly remnant in Judah.

"Seek righteousness." The remnant also should be very careful of the way they live their lives. "Seek meekness." They are not to be lifted up by arrogance and pride and self-sufficiency, for that was one of the great sins of the nation. This is also a danger among believers today. Someone has said that there is "a pride of race, a pride of face, and a pride of grace." Some people are even proud that they have been saved by grace! They

feel that that is something for them to boast about. They feel that they are the peculiar and particular pets of almighty God because of their salvation! My friend, we have nothing to glory in. The apostle Paul said that he had nothing to glory in, and believe me, if Paul didn't have anything to glory in, I'm sure that none of us has. There is a danger of being proud of the fact that we are God's children, but it ought rather to lead to meekness. He says here, "Seek righteousness, seek meekness."

"It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger." It is a glorious, wonderful thing to be hidden in the cleft of the rock and to be covered by His wings. God's children need to recognize that, although they will not go through the Great Tribulation period, they may experience a great deal of judgment and a great deal of trouble just as these people did. Judah did not go through the Great Tribulation, the great Day of the Lord, but they certainly were going through, as I like to put it, "the little tribulation period." All of us are going to have tribulation to a certain extent in this life -- we are going to have trouble. I heard the story years ago of a woman who was a maid and was complaining about her troubles. Apparently she had quite a few of them. When the lady of the house rather rebuked her for complaining, the woman replied, "When the good Lord sends me tribulation, I intend to tribulate." I agree with her. I believe we ought to tribulate. Paul says that we groan within these bodies, but that does not mean we are in the Great Tribulation nor that there is a chance of our going through it.

We come now to a section, beginning with [verse 4](#) and going on down to [verse 8](#) of chapter 3, in which we see the judgment of the nations. This passage reveals that God judges all the nations of this earth. The God of the Bible is not a local deity. He is not one that you put on a shelf. He is not one that is local or national. It has been the great error of the white race when attempting to "Christianize" a people by bringing them the gospel, also to try to make them live as we live and to adopt our customs and our methods. Well, there are a lot of different people on the topside of this earth, and they are all people for whom Christ died. Our business is to get them to hear the gospel, to get the Word of God to them, and then let them work their Christian life into their own customs and into their own patterns of life. I am told that my ancestors in Europe were pagan, eating raw meat, and living in caves, and when the gospel was brought to them, it did a great deal for them. The early missionaries who came to my ancestors didn't try to make them like they were. Apparently, the missionaries let them develop their own civilization, and we should do the same thing with others.

The God of the Bible is the God of this universe. He is the Creator of the universe and of mankind. Notice that He is going to judge these other nations, not just His own people. And He judges other nations for their sin. God has put up certain standards that have become worldwide. They have been written into the Ten Commandments, which God gave to Moses. All nations have a sense of right and wrong, although they may vary on what is right and what is wrong. A missionary was telling me about a tribe he had worked with out in the South Seas. They were headhunters; they were cannibals. But he said that they had a high sense of honesty. He told me that you could take your pocketbook with your money in it and put it down in the center of where the tribe dwelt and leave it there for a week, and nobody would touch it. But, of course, they didn't mind eating their mother-in-law for dinner. (You would never know exactly what they meant when they said they had their mother-in-law over for dinner -- whether she came over to eat with

them or whether they ate her!) But they did have a high sense of honesty, which is something I don't think we have in my country today. A lady told me that she left her purse on the counter in a department store, and when she returned in less than a minute, the purse was gone with no trace of it anywhere. But, of course, that thief was not going to eat his mother-in-law for dinner that evening. Standards apparently vary, but God has given to the nations of the world certain standards. You find them in all the nations of the earth. No nation could be a civilized nation if it did not recognize some of these. But when a people depart from the living and true God, they go into the deepest kind of paganism and heathenism and reach a place where God gives them up.

God now begins His judgment of the nations --

For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation: they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day, and Ekron shall be rooted up [[Zeph. 2:4](#)].

Mentioned here are four of the cities of the Philistines which are going to be judged. Somebody might ask, "Why didn't He mention Gath? It was a prominent place." Well, at this time Gath was pretty much under the control of the southern kingdom of Judah. These four cities are to be judged -- Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron.

"For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation." It is interesting that Gaza is forsaken today, and Ashkelon is a desolation. There is a place called Ashkelon, but it is not over the ruins of the old city. The old one is right down by the sea. I have been there and have seen the ruins of the temple of Dagon that are there.

"They shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day." Ashdod was driven out, and it was done at noonday. In that land, the people always take time off at noontime; that is, they have what is called south of the border a siesta. In some places in South America, you cannot get into a store from around twelve to two o'clock in the afternoon. You are just wasting your time if you try to go shopping because nothing will be open. You can get into a store at nine o'clock at night, but they take time for a siesta in the heat of the day. At Ashdod it's pretty warm. Although it is by the sea, it gets very warm there in the summer. Zephaniah says that it will be destroyed and that they will be driven out at noonday. In other words, the enemy will take them off guard. Ashdod was completely obliterated. Israel possesses that territory today. They have built apartment building after apartment building, an oil refinery, and also a port there. It is one of the principal ports now. But in that day it was absolutely cleaned off. There are no ruins there at all.

"And Ekron shall be rooted up." Ekron was rooted up; it was completely removed.

Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! the word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant [[Zeph. 2:5](#)].

"Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast." All these places are along the seacoast.

"The nation of the Cherethites!" The Cherethites were people who came from the island of Crete, and they evidently were the Philistines. The word Philistine comes from the Hebrew word for migration. They immigrated to that country. This, by the way, ought to

answer the question that some people, especially the liberals, have raised: "What right did Israel have to drive the Philistines out of their native land?" It was not their native land. Actually, Israel was there long before the Philistines were there. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their offspring were in that land, and then they went down to the land of Egypt. In that interval, the Philistines came into that country.

"The word of the LORD is against you; O Canaan, the land of the Philistines, I will even destroy thee, that there shall be no inhabitant." He says that they are to be judged. By the way, when was the last time you saw a Philistine? They have disappeared.

And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds,  
and folds for flocks [[Zeph. 2:6](#)].

This took place, and this condition existed for over a thousand years -- in fact, almost nineteen hundred years.

And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they  
shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down  
in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn  
away their captivity [[Zeph. 2:7](#)].

This is God's promise to His people that He will return them from their captivity to inhabit the land of Philistia, which was a part of the territory God had given to Abraham. I have pictures of Israelis lying on the beach at Ashkelon during a holiday. It is a beautiful, sandy beach on the Mediterranean Sea. This prophecy is a picture of a scene that can be demonstrated any day of the year, although it may change tomorrow. However, I do not consider what we see there today as a fulfillment of prophecy, because I believe that Israel will be driven from that land again before their final return under God.

Now He moves over from the west to the east and to the nations which were contiguous to the land of Judah --

I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the  
children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people, and  
magnified themselves against their border.

Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,  
Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as  
Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a  
perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them,  
and the remnant of my people shall possess them [[Zeph. 2:8-9](#)].

I have visited a few countries in my lifetime, and the poorest country that I have ever been in is the modern nation of the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan. It occupies what was the land of the Moabites and the Ammonites. The modern capital there is Amman. You just do not find any more desolate country than that. All of this prophecy has been fulfilled in the past.

This shall they have for their pride, because they have reproached  
and magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of hosts  
[[Zeph. 2:10](#)].

They are judged for their pride, and as you know, pride is the way the devil sinned at the beginning.

The LORD will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen [[Zeph. 2:11](#)].

God is going to judge the nations of the world because they have ignored Him. They have not recognized Him. ". . . when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" ([Rom. 1:21-23](#)). This is the reason God will judge them.

Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword [[Zeph. 2:12](#)].

Ethiopia is in Africa. You see, this is a worldwide judgment.

And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness [[Zeph. 2:13](#)].

"And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria." Ethiopia is in the south, but now we move to the north and find that Assyria also is to be judged. In Zephaniah's day, Assyria was making quite a splash in the world.

"And will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness." That is the way Nineveh is today. The modern city of Mosul is across the Tigris River from the site of old Nineveh, and it is a miserable place, so I'm told. Nineveh and all of that area is still a desolation.

And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work [[Zeph. 2:14](#)].

In other words, their buildings are to be torn down.

This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand [[Zeph. 2:15](#)].

"Every one that passeth by her shall hiss." People will hiss at Nineveh in the sense that it will be sort of an explosive expletive that comes from a person who is surprised: "Why, I thought that Assyria was a great nation and that Nineveh was a great city! Just look at it in desolation and ruin!" They hiss, and their breath is just blown out of them, as it were.

"And wag his hand." They will simply shake their hands back and forth, being absolutely stupefied to see what has taken place through God's judgment of the nations.

God has judged nations in the past, and God judges nations today. The Lord Jesus says that He will judge nations in the future. As we see in the Book of Habakkuk, God was moving in that day in a way that the prophet never suspected. And, my friend, God is moving in the nations of the world today. He has judged them in the past. He will judge them in the future.

## Chapter 3

**THEME:** Judgment of the earth and of all nations; all judgments removed and the Kingdom established

The first eight verses of this chapter conclude this section, which deals with the judgment of the earth and of all nations. By now you may be tired of listening to Zephaniah talk about the harsh, the extreme, the unmitigating judgment of God upon His people. This is probably the strongest language you will find in the Scriptures until you come to the language which the Lord Jesus used in [Matthew 23](#). If you will read that passage in connection with this chapter, you will see that the Lord Jesus topped even Zephaniah in the extreme language of judgment, which He used. It is bloodcurdling, if you please.

We saw in chapter 2 that the judgment of God is worldwide, it is global in its extent, and it includes every nation on the topside of the earth. In [verses 1-5](#) of this chapter, God returns to the judgment that is coming upon His people, and He is very specific. He reveals that the light which a person has will determine the extent of the judgment -- in other words, privilege creates responsibility. Your responsibility is measured by the privilege that you have. I like to express it like this: I would rather be a Hottentot in the darkest part of Africa than to be sitting in a Bible-believing church today, hearing the gospel but doing nothing about it. I won't argue about the judgment of the Hottentots in Africa, as that is not what we are talking about here, but I do know what God will do with a person of privilege, one who has had the opportunity of hearing the Word of God and has turned his back upon it. This is very extreme language that is used to express the judgment on Jerusalem, a judgment that is in ratio to her privilege --

[Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!](#)  
[\[Zeph. 3:1\]](#).

Jerusalem was the city in which the temple was located. The priests were there, and the scribes had the Word of God. When wise men came from the east, seeking the King of the Jews, the scribes had no problem in telling them where the Messiah was to be born, but they simply did not manifest any interest in checking to see if the wise men had any valid information about the Messiah. The scribes knew the letter of the Law, but that is all they knew. They did not know the Author of the Book, and they were far from Him. God's condemnation of Jerusalem is on the basis of all the light they had.

"Woe to her that is filthy and polluted." This matter of pollution is not something that is new today, but the pollution spoken of here is not physical pollution. This pollution is not on the outside of man; it is on the inside of man. The thing that is causing the pollution on the outside today is that man is polluted and filthy on the inside -- that is, before God he is not right.

When a man gets right with God, he is not going to dump his garbage on another man's property, and he is not going to fill a lovely, babbling brook with filth. The ones who are polluting this earth are the godless folk. For example, in one of the beach towns here in Southern California several years ago, there was a meeting of some hippies, a godless crowd. They met in a pasture to hold a protest meeting against pollution. They were decrying the pollution caused by the large factories with their smokestacks which pour out all the dregs and waste materials resulting from industrial production. Very candidly, I agree with them that that's a terrible thing to have taking place. But the interesting thing is that after they held their protest meeting, the city had to spend two thousand dollars to clean up the pasture which those who were protesting pollution had polluted! May I say to you, pollution is on the inside, and when you are godless and wrong with God, you are certainly going to pollute this earth.

Man today is actually wrecking this earth that we are living on, and God's condemnation of Jerusalem is that it is a polluted city, although it was a privileged city, a city that had glorious and wonderful opportunities. This is the picture of that city, but it is also a picture of mankind in general. Notice Paul's verdict in [Romans 3:16](#), "Destruction and misery are in their ways." What a picture of mankind! Man has always left a pile of tin cans and rubbish wherever he has gone on the earth.

Why did God single out the city of Jerusalem? It was a privileged city. This city had the temple of God. It had the Word of God. Therefore, its judgment will be harsher than that of any other city.

God calls Jerusalem not only filthy and polluted, but He also calls it "the oppressing city." It is the oppressing city because of the fact that she did not regard the rights of her people, especially of the poor. She did not consider them; she oppressed the poor.

This is something that I think is so hypocritical in my own government. I am not talking politics now, nor am I speaking of any one party because this is true of the whole structure that we have in Washington, D.C., today. Constantly our congressmen are coming up with programs to help the poor. It is interesting that it is always some rich senator who comes up with such a program. To begin with, he does not know how poor folk feel. He does not know their hardships. Such men have never experienced poverty, and their programs never help the poor; they help some bureaucrats but not the poor. I do not think the poor will ever be helped by any of the plans that men devise. Part of the problem is that the middle-class people are taxed to finance any such program. The middle class are the ones making it possible for the upper class to take our money to help the poor or the lower class. I personally would like to move into one of the other brackets -- it would be more comfortable there today. God said that He would judge the city of Jerusalem for their oppression of the poor; so we know how He feels about our oppression.

God is not through with His judgment; He goes on to spell out their sin --

[She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God \[Zeph. 3:2\].](#)

"She obeyed not the voice." She was disobedient to God. This city had heard the voice of God but had been disobedient to Him.

"She received not correction." God had sent judgment. One hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem scared the living daylights out of these people -- they were frightened beyond measure (see [2Kings 18](#) -- [2Kings 19](#)). They had been partially judged, but God had let the judgment pass over. You would think that they would have learned their lesson and would have turned to God, but they didn't. Likewise, there are many Christians today who suffer but never learn why God permits it. He never lets anything happen to His own unless there is a purpose back of it. This city, like many of us, "received not correction." She did not learn the lesson.

"She trusted not in the LORD." The city had no trust in Him at all but looked to something else. When the modern nation of Israel celebrated her twentieth anniversary, they displayed this motto: "Science will bring peace to this land." My friend, the Bible says that the Messiah is the Prince of Peace, and He is the only One who can bring peace. But they don't trust Him -- they trust science. After that twentieth anniversary, believe me, Israel got into hot water. Science did not bring peace to that land, and my nation has not brought peace to them either.

"She drew not near to her God." Today men are not running to God; they are running from Him as fast as they possibly can. What a picture this is of the city of Jerusalem!

Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow [[Zeph. 3:3](#)].

"Her princes within her are roaring lions." God is now talking about the leadership of the nation; and, when you speak of judgment, you must talk about the leadership of any nation or city. In my country, when men are running for office, they are always telling us that they are going to think about us, they are going to help us, and they are going to do something for us. So far, as best I can tell, nobody has ever done anything, either from the city level, the state level, or the national level. Why? Because "her princes within her are roaring lions" -- they make a big noise.

"Her judges are evening wolves." We have a second meaning for wolf today, and I'm not sure but that the Lord included that thought here also. "Her judges are evening wolves" -- in other words, they are willing to work day and night -- not for the people but for themselves.

"They gnaw not the bones till the morrow." These men are willing to get all they can. Dr. Charles L. Feinberg comments: "The judges of the people were filled with insatiable greed, devouring all at once in their ravenous hunger. They left nothing till the morning" (Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Malachi, p. 64). Many of the men who go into office in our country, promising to help us, have not helped us, but they have done well themselves. By the time they retire from office, many of these men have become well-to-do. This is the thing that God judges. Judah was a nation like ours that had the Word of God. That which is said of Jerusalem could apply to us also. If God spoke out of heaven today, He would have to say these same things concerning us.

Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law [[Zeph. 3:4](#)].

"Her prophets are light." This does not mean that they give light! It means that they do not really give the Word of God, but they give a little smattering of psychology with a few Scripture verses put over it like a sugarcoated pill. That's the sort of thing that is being dished out today. They do not talk about judgment or the need for sinners to come to Christ.

"Her prophets are . . . treacherous persons." That is, they are racketeers, religious racketeers. Again, let me suggest that you read [Matthew 23](#) to see if God has changed. You will find there the Lord Jesus' denouncement of religious rulers.

"Her priests have polluted the sanctuary." This is a terrible thing. How have they polluted the sanctuary? They have caused the world outside to lose respect for that which was sacred. By their lives, they brought disrespect upon the temple, upon the sanctuary. The same thing took place in Samuel's day when old Eli was priest. Men no longer had respect for religion. And today men decry the fact that the church has lost its influence. I decry it also, but, very frankly, I do not think that the church deserves the respect of the outside world when we cannot and do not present to them a church that is holy and that is living for God.

"They have done violence to the law." In other words, they did not interpret it accurately. In fact, they did violence to it by omitting the teaching of the Word of God. "The law" here means the total Word of God.

The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame [[Zeph. 3:5](#)].

"The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity." God is not going to do evil. The minute that His people do evil while God does nothing, it looks as if God approves that sort of thing. However, God says that He intends to move in judgment -- God will not do iniquity.

"Every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame." The unjust simply continue on in sin with no shame at all that is public knowledge.

We have now in [verses 6-8](#) the picture of the Great Tribulation period that is coming in the future, the great Day of the Lord which Zephaniah has talked about. Zephaniah moves from speaking of the city of Jerusalem to talking about the nations of the world in the last days. This is Armageddon, which ends with the return of Christ to earth.

I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate: I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant [[Zeph. 3:6](#)].

It has been my privilege to walk through the ruins of great civilizations of the past. Recently, I walked through the ruins of Ostia, the playground of the Romans. It is just

fifteen miles from Rome, but not very well known. It will become well known later, as Rome is developing it, and it will become a tourist attraction. Ostia was where Rome lived it up. It was the Las Vegas of the Roman Empire. As you stand in the ruins of that city and see the stones of the Roman road which were worn by chariot wheels, it is difficult to think that those streets were once crowded and that that city was a great city in its heyday. God says here, "I'm going to make them desolate." It's very difficult to believe that Los Angeles could become that desolate, but it could. It is difficult to believe that New York City could become desolate, but it could.

I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever, I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings [[Zeph. 3:7](#)].

The warnings of judgment and the little judgment that did come had no effect upon them. Eventually that will bring down finally the great Day of the Lord, the final time of judgment, which is coming upon this earth.

Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy [[Zeph. 3:8](#)].

This earth which you and I are living on is moving toward a judgment. Although folk don't believe it, they are moving to judgment. It is this judgment which will be initiated when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to this earth for His church. It begins then with the Great Tribulation period and ends when He comes to establish His Kingdom on this earth.

### **All Judgments Removed And The Kingdom Established (3:9-20)**

We are now going to pass from the darkness to the day and to see the blessings which are in store. The storm is over as far as the little Book of Zephaniah is concerned. The book opens with dark forebodings and with ominous rumblings of judgment. The first part of this chapter, which deals with the judgment of the city of Jerusalem, is almost frightening to read. It is frightening when you come to that picture of the Great Tribulation period when God will judge all nations when they are brought up against Jerusalem in that last day (see [Zech. 14:1-3](#)). We have seen two kinds of judgment in the Book of Zephaniah. There is God's judgment of His own people, which is always chastisement. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth . . ." ([Heb. 12:6](#)) -- in other words, He child-trains, or disciplines, them. Then God must judge the unbelieving world also. This is the picture of judgment that is before us in this little book. The Book of Zephaniah is like a Florida hurricane, a Texas tornado, a Mississippi River flood, a Minnesota snowstorm, and a California earthquake all rolled into one.

As you read this book you might think that God hates His people and that He hates mankind in general; you might think that He is vindictive, cruel, and brutal, that He is unfeeling and unmoved. However, the little story that I told in the Introduction is the story that illustrates the message of Zephaniah. It is the story of the man who took a little child into the darkness of the night and rushed her away from home. It looked as if he

were kidnapping the child. It was frightful when he turned her over to another man who plunged a knife into her abdomen. But when you know the whole story, you find that the man was the father of that little girl. His own precious little girl had been having attacks of appendicitis, and that night he picked her up and rushed her to the hospital to put her into the hands of the family physician. Everything was done in tenderness. We find today that our Great Physician takes His own, the ones He loves, and puts them on the operating table. Even in judgment, God is love. When He is judging the unsaved or when He is judging those who are His own, God is love.

Someday the final curtain is coming down on this world in which we live. Man's little day will be over, and judgment will come for lost mankind. But God will restore His children, and we will find out that what we endured down here was actually a blessing in disguise. Let me tell you another little story, one that actually happened. It is the story of a boy who was away from home in school, and things got rough for him there. The lessons were difficult, and he was homesick. He wrote home and said, "Dad, it's hard here. The assignments are too heavy, and the dormitory rules are too strict. I'm homesick and I want to come home." The father wrote back a stern and severe letter in which he said, "You stay on there and study hard. Apply yourself to your work." When the boy got that letter, he thought, I don't think my dad loves me anymore. My dad couldn't love me, or he wouldn't want me to go through this torture that I'm going through here. We have a heavenly Father who tells us, "You stay down there in the college of life. I'm preparing a place for you, and I am also preparing you for that place." With this in mind, let us turn to this final passage of Zephaniah.

For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may  
all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent  
[\[Zeph. 3:9\]](#).

God has this far-off purpose -- it is called the teleological purpose of God. We will find it all through this section because now we are in the light. We are no longer in the darkness of the judgment, no longer in the Day of the Lord which begins at night. The sun has now arisen, and light has broken upon mankind.

"For then will I turn to the people a pure language." He does not mean that everybody is going to speak Hebrew, although a great many people think that that is the meaning. Nor is He going to turn them to some other, perhaps unknown, language which everybody will speak. Nor is the "pure language" English spoken with a Texas accent! Many people find my Texas accent rather distasteful. I thought for awhile that you were going to have to get accustomed to it because it was what everybody would be speaking in heaven -- but this doesn't mean that at all. "Pure language" means exactly what it says: the language will be pure. There will be no blasphemy heard. There will be no vileness nor vulgarity. There will be nothing repulsive. The language will be pure.

At one time we had a neighbor who was a very big-hearted woman in many ways, but she was unsaved. She not only had a mean tongue, but she also had the vilest tongue that I have ever heard. It was offensive to people whenever she would lose her temper, for you could hear her throughout the entire neighborhood. It was very distasteful, so much so that some wanted to report her. In heaven, my friend, there will be nobody to report

because there is going to be a pure language. Heaven will be pure in thought, word, and deed.

"That they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent." There will be no rebellion against God in that day. Heaven is going to be a really nice neighborhood to live in. In fact, it is going to be a glorious place, and you are going to have some good neighbors there.

From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering [[Zeph. 3:10](#)].

This verse of Scripture has been variously translated, and all sorts of interpretations have been presented for it. One interpretation is that the ark of the covenant is down in Ethiopia and that it will be brought up to Jerusalem as an offering at this time. I do not think that that is the thing Zephaniah has in mind here at all. Others call attention to a tribe in Ethiopia or Abyssinia known as the Falashas, which comes from the same root as the word Philistine, meaning migrant. They claim that they can trace their origin back to Israel, that they are Israelites. It is argued that these are the "suppliants" referred to here. Many feel that this verse speaks of those converted from the nations of the world who will bring dispersed Israelites back to their land as an offering to the Lord. My position is that this verse means that Ethiopia will enter the millennial Kingdom -- that is what is important for us to see. The offering that they will bring is the sacrifice of Christ Himself; in other words, they will come, having accepted His redemption.

In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain [[Zeph. 3:11](#)].

God is talking to His own here. We have seen that one of the things for which God was judging them was that there was no shame in their vile acts and gross immorality -- they were not ashamed of it. But, my friend, God's people will never reach the place where they can be satisfied in sin. If you can live in sin and be happy -- you can be sure of one thing -- you are not a child of God. The prodigal son was never happy in the pigpen, and since he was the son of the father, he had to say, "I'm going home to my father." That revealed that he wasn't a pig. Pigs love pigpens, but sons don't love pigpens. A son wants to go to the father's house because he has the nature of the father. God makes this very clear here: "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me."

"For then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain." This speaks of the day when the meek shall inherit the earth. The other crowd has it now, and they are not doing very well with it.

I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD [[Zeph. 3:12](#)].

When the Babylonians took Judah into captivity, there were three deportations of slaves taken, but they never took all of the people. The poor, the afflicted, and the crippled were

not taken to Babylon. You can imagine how they felt. It was terrible to go into Babylonian captivity to become a slave, but it was actually worse to be left behind. God says here, "I intend to take care of the afflicted and the poor." You will notice that all the way through Scripture, the Lord often mentions the fact that He intends someday to see that the poor get an honest deal and that they are treated right. The only one in the world today who has a helpful program for the poor is the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are poor and needy, He is the one to go to. He can help you, and He is the only one who can help.

The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid [[Zeph. 3:13](#)].

"The remnant of Israel shalt not do iniquity." God has always had a remnant, and there will be this very large remnant in the Millennium.

"Nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth." That the day is coming when they will not do these things would seem to indicate that they once did them. Even God's people indulged in sin -- but not permanently. They cannot continue to live in sin. They may get their feet dirty, they may get down in the pigpen, but they simply will not stay in the pigpen.

"For they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid." All of this has reference to the day when God will put His people back in their land and give them the land. Therefore, are you prepared to say that what has happened and is happening in that land today is a fulfillment of prophecy? Is it true that "none shall make them afraid"? My friend, Israel has not had a moment, since they've been in that land, that they have not been frightened.

We come now to a description of the day when the King is going to set up His Kingdom on the earth.

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more [[Zeph. 3:14-15](#)].

The Lord Jesus will come to the earth, evil will be put down, and ". . . the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" ([Isa. 11:9](#)).

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack [[Zeph. 3:16](#)].

"In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not." Jerusalem has reason to be afraid now, but she will have nothing to fear in that day.

"And to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack." In other words, "Be busy for the Lord."

[Verse 17](#) is a marvelous verse --

The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing [[Zeph. 3:17](#)].

My friend, God has a purpose. He goes through the night of judgment in order to bring us into the light of a new day. He does all of this that the day might come when He can rest in His love. God loves you and me today. I don't know about you, but I doubt very seriously whether He can rest in His love for Vernon McGee. He could say of me, "He's not perfected yet. He seems so immature. He is so filled with faults. He is apt to digress, apt to detour, at any moment." God cannot rest in His love today. But the day is coming when we will be in His likeness -- after He has put us on the "operating table". Then He is going to bring us to Himself. What a wonderful and glorious picture this is!

I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.

Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.

At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD [[Zeph. 3:18-20](#)].

Oh, this is the day of light that will come. It will be glorious for the nation Israel, and it will be glorious for the church also. God is putting many of us through the furnace, and He is putting us through trials. The glorious thing about heaven will not be the golden streets, it will not be the gates of pearl, and it will not be the fact that He is going to wipe away all tears. The glorious thing in heaven will be that we are going to thank Him for every trial we had and for every burden that He put on us in this life.

I conclude with this wonderful little poem, "In the Crucible" --

Out from the mine and the darkness,  
Out from the damp and the mold,  
Out from the fiery furnace,  
Cometh each grain of gold.  
Crushed into atoms and leveled  
Down to the humblest dust  
With never a heart to pity,  
With never a hand to trust.  
Molten and hammered and beaten,  
Seemeth it ne'er to be done.  
Oh! for such fiery trial,  
What hath the poor gold done?  
Oh! 'twere a mercy to leave it  
Down in the damp and the mold.  
If this is the glory of living,  
Then better to be dross than gold.  
Under the press and the roller,  
Into the jaws of the mint,  
Stamped with the emblem of freedom

With never a flaw or a dint.  
Oh! what a joy the refining  
Out of the damp and the mold!  
And stamped with the glorious image,  
Oh, beautiful coin of gold!

Someday, when you and I are in the presence of our Savior, we will thank Him for every burden, every trial, every heartache. We will thank Him for dealing with us as a wise father deals with his children, and we will thank Him for the dark side of His love.

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